

Stress Management: Preventing Stress through Lifestyle Management

In today's world, most of us can't avoid stress. But we *can* learn ways to take care of ourselves so that stress does not become a problem. Taking care of yourself is the first step in stress management. You can learn some basic lifestyle practices that keep you healthy and strong so that you can prevent stress.

Are You Vulnerable to Stress?

Start by asking yourself, "How vulnerable am I to stress?" People most at risk of stress are those who eat poorly, chain smoke, drink a lot of beverages with caffeine, sleep a few hours a night and never exercise. People may not feel much stress when they have a healthy diet, take time to relax, get plenty of sleep and exercise regularly. If they do, they manage it so it does not become a problem. They have the physical and mental energy to handle stress.

A Healthy Lifestyle

There are many possible lifestyle guidelines that keep you healthy and prevent stress.

- **Avoid cigarettes.** Cigarette smoking is the single most important preventable cause of illness and early death, and the effects of smoking can be reversed. People tend to smoke more when under stress.
- **Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise helps people of all ages look and feel better. Different kinds of exercise provide specific health benefits.
- **Eat sensibly.** A nutritious diet is essential for maintaining good health and proper weight. A balanced diet, especially one low in fat or sugar, helps to prevent stress.
- **Get plenty of rest.** Restful sleep helps you maintain health and cope better with problems.
- **If you drink, drink only in moderation.** Alcohol is frequently used to reduce stress because it has a relaxing effect. Regular, heavy use of alcohol leads to disease. Drinking and driving often leads to fatal or crippling accidents.
- **Avoid too much caffeine.** This is in many products such as coffee, tea, sodas and chocolate. It speeds up the body and can exaggerate the effects of stress.
- **Use care in taking drugs.** Although drugs may provide temporary relief from stress symptoms, they may not solve ongoing problems and tensions. Excessive or continued use of either prescription or illegal drugs may cause physical and mental problems and absenteeism from work.
- **Be safety-conscious.** Falls and injuries from auto or pedestrian accidents can lead to hospitalization and disability. Good safety at home, work, and on the road prevents accidents and injuries.
- **Get health care.** Regular health care helps prevent disease by catching problems early and keeps them from getting worse.
- **Have friends you can talk to.** People who give and receive affection regularly and who can let out their feelings to someone who cares tend to have fewer health problems and cope better with stress.

- **Learn to manage stress.** Some stress is a normal part of living. Three steps keep daily stress from becoming a problem: take time to relax, talk with a friend and learn to keep a perspective on things that are important and those that are not.

Resources Are Available – Call your Magellan EAP at 1-800-234-1EAP

Additional information, self-help tools and other resources are available online at www.MagellanHealth.com. Or call us for more information, help and support. Counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.